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ABSTRACT

This report includes descriptions of ongoing reading programs for Navajo students in Rough Rock, Rock Point, and Navajo Community College, presented by teacher-participants in the conference on reading held in Kayenta, Arizona, January 30-31, 1970. Also included are reports from the Navajo Reading Study staff and a discussion of the problems of the various reading programs. See ED 035 484, Report No. 3, a bibliography of Navajo reading materials, and AL 002 547, Report No. 5, a study of Navajo language maintenance in six-year-olds. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (AMM)

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NAVAJO READING STUDY

The University of New Mexico

AL 002 548

Progress Report No. 6

TEACHING INITIAL READING IN NAVAJO: REPORT OF A CONFERENCE OF EDUCATORS HELD AT KAYENTA, JANUARY 30-31, 1970

Edited by Penny Murphy

April, 1970

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Introduction

Funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in summer 1969, the Navajo Reading Study was well under way by the time the President endorsed the Commissioner of Education's call for a national campaign in reading. It is concerned with the Navajo right to read, working on the feasibility and effect of teaching Navajo children to read in their own language first.

In Progress Report No. 3, we issued a first version of an Analytical Bibliography of Navajo Reading Materials: this was our first attempt to show what efforts had so far been expended in the area. A second concern of the Study was to bring together teachers presently engaged in teaching Navajos to read their own language and to find out about their experiences and needs. The proceedings of this meeting are reported here.

This report was written up by Penny Murphy from notes that she, Agnes Holm and Irene Silentman took of the discussion. Participants in the conference were asked to read the draft and submit corrections.

We are deeply indebted to the Navajo educators who joined us at this meeting. They are the ones who will bear

the brunt of developing Navajo education as something really Navajo. We were impressed by their devotion, which augurs well for the future.

Bernard Spolsky, Director
Navajo Reading Study

Teaching Initial Reading in Navajo:
Report of a Conference of Educators

held at Kayenta, January 30-31, 1970.

List of Participants

From Rough Rock Demonstration School:	Eva Benally Rebecca Dotson Ethelou Yazzie
From Rock Point Boarding School:	Norma Francisco Anthony Harvey Judy Harvey Jane Hill Marie Platero
From Navajo Community College:	William Morgan, Sr. Paul Platero
From Northwestern University:	Ken Begishe
From The University of New Mexico:	Agnes Holm Wayne Holm Paul Murphy Penny Murphy Bob Norris Irene Silentman Bernard Spolsky

Bernard Spolsky, Director of the Navajo Reading Study, opened the meeting by stating that the purpose of the conference was to determine what was taking place in the teaching of initial reading in Navajo. Each of the participants was asked to introduce himself, and then the following conference agenda was presented:

1) during the afternoon and evening sessions, the Rough Rock, Rock Point, and Navajo Community College teachers would be asked to describe their programs.

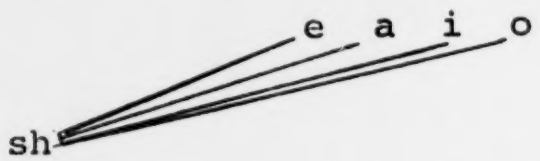
2) in the Saturday morning session, the Navajo Reading Study staff would report on what they have been doing, and a discussion of the problems of the various reading programs and how the Navajo Reading Study could help would follow.

Spolsky stressed that although the Navajo Reading Study is concerned specifically with the problem of children coming to school speaking Navajo and having to learn English, its finding should be relevant to any child coming to school and not speaking the language used as the medium of instruction. He explained that at this meeting the Navajo Reading Study was particularly interested in learning about whatever experiences the participants had accumulated in teaching young children to read Navajo, and getting some idea of the materials, approaches and methodologies they had used.

Eva Benally, who directs the Follow Through Program at Rough Rock Demonstration School, told about the set-up at her school. The school has an ungraded program which is divided into four age-grouped "Phases." (See page 4.) Phases I, which includes kindergarten, and II are taught in Navajo with a period of English as a second language. During the second semester of Phase II, level III, English becomes the instructional language. Mother aides are used in the classrooms. Classroom materials are prepared by the Rough Rock Curriculum Center. At present, Ken Begishe is translating some Curriculum Center materials into Navajo. Each teacher is encouraged to teach in her own fashion.

After Gattegno offered them an orientation to his 'words in color' method, those Rough Rock teachers involved in the teaching of reading in English began using his approach. They now have adapted his method for the teaching of initial reading in Navajo. In this adaptation, the vowels are taught first.

At this point, Paul Platero demonstrated a technique for teaching vowels. His advice was to keep the class moving. He suggested writing a vowel on the board and then eliciting rapid responses by pointing with pencil (or some other object.) He wrote the following on the board:



By combining various symbols with the pointing technique, the teacher can elicit the following responses: esh, ash, ish, osh and she, sha, shi, sho and eshe, asha, ishi, osho, etc., the idea being that the children respond as fast as often as possible. Rebecca Dotson made the comment that the children do well with the short vowels but they have trouble with the long vowels.

When questioned, Eva Benally felt that the children typically begin reading at five. Rebecca Dotson pointed out that the timetable usually depends on the individual child. When teaching a long word, she suggests teaching a syllable at a time. The vowels are not difficult to teach when each letter has a key word and picture. Wayne Holm asked Eva Benally if she taught nasality and tone and she answered that she did but not initially and with as little fuss as possible. Bernard Spolsky asked her what sort of materials are used for reading and she explained that they dittoed booklets. Some are simple stories of family life and others are adaptations of Goossen's Navajo Made Easier. Several English language books have been transformed into Navajo readers by covering the text with Navajo translations. Lynda Dick, a teacher's aide, did the translations. Navajo alphabet cards with pictures are also used.

Ethelou Yazzie in describing what she had been doing, said that she had had the same group for a year and a half and that

she had taught them in Navajo for that length of time. Now, however, she was teaching in English, introducing reading in English. She began her initial reading program (in Navajo) by teaching the Navajo alphabet but she found the sound-symbol correspondences hard to get across. Later, when they began learning to read in English, the children found it difficult to transfer the 'e' and 'a' from Navajo to English.

The following diagram shows the language division of instruction at Rough Rock Demonstration School:

Phase I	Phase II (5-9 yrs)	Phase III + IV (10-13+ yrs)
Pre-school	level I, II III	
Navajo	Navajo	Navajo-
		English
	ESL	ESL

Eva Benally stated that one of the biggest problems of the reading program is the lack of sequenced materials and advanced reading materials. Presently at Rough Rock Demonstration School, they are using stories which were written by other Phase's groups, Werner's Transcription Course and materials developed by the Navajo Mission, Inc. Ethelou Yazzie told about using an English language series put out by Wallace Cathey, Dan and His Pets, in which the English phrases were covered over with Navajo text. Again, the urgent need for materials was emphasized.

Anthony Harvey, Bilingual Co-ordinator, began the Rock Point report by saying that he had been substituting so much

lately that he had been kept away from his program. He suggested that Judy Harvey, the teacher's aide in the beginner's class, tell what she had been doing. Judy teaches reading readiness in Navajo. She demonstrated sets of flash cards that she and Jane Hill had developed. The flash cards help teach the following:

1) Animal discrimination: numbers, colors, size, etc.
2) Abstract shapes: (same/different)
3) Letter forms with high pitch, nasal, long and short vowels and glottal stops.
4) Reversals: la al (same/different)

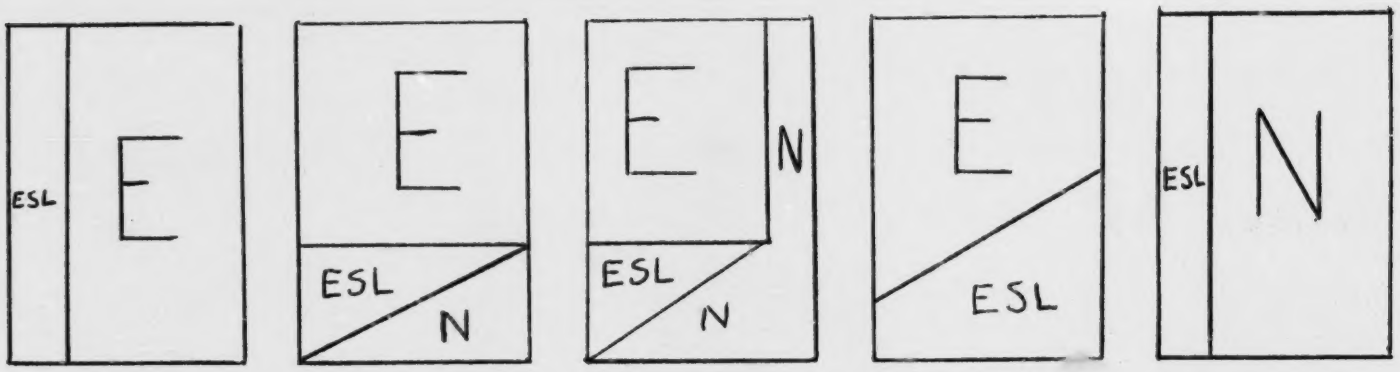
They also worked out some oral discrimination techniques:

1) Letter names (using English names)
2) Ear training: listening to a word and showing with the hand if it is high/low, short/long (spreading the thumb and forefinger), etc.
3) Letter to sound correspondence: blending letters to make words, words to make sentences.

They also developed games like Bingo for recall and guessing games. They said they found it hard to teach just the vowels. Jane Hill, who is the teacher in the Beginner's classroom, continued the report by saying that she does much the same thing as Judy; however, her medium of instruction is English. The English used in the classroom is ESL-based. Concepts are taught in Navajo and then 'labeled' in English. Jane

also teaches ESL with the Mary Jane Cook materials. She described the classroom structure of their bilingual program. Judy teaches in Navajo and responds to the children in Navajo, and Jane does the same in English. The room is divided into three parts: at either end of the room are the Navajo and English teaching areas, in the middle section are the children's desks and this area is neutral: e.g., either language can be used. Jane maintained that the time schedule worked, even though it was complex.

Bernard Spolsky ended the session with a summary. Using the following diagrams he identified five different approaches to bilingual education:



1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

1) While teaching English as a second language, English is the medium of instruction.

2) While teaching ESL, Navajo is the medium of instruction. At a certain point English becomes the medium of instruction.

3) The same as number two with the exception that the use of Navajo is never completely stopped.

4) Only ESL is taught until the child understands a bit of

English and at this point, instruction begins in English with ESL continued in a diminishing amount.

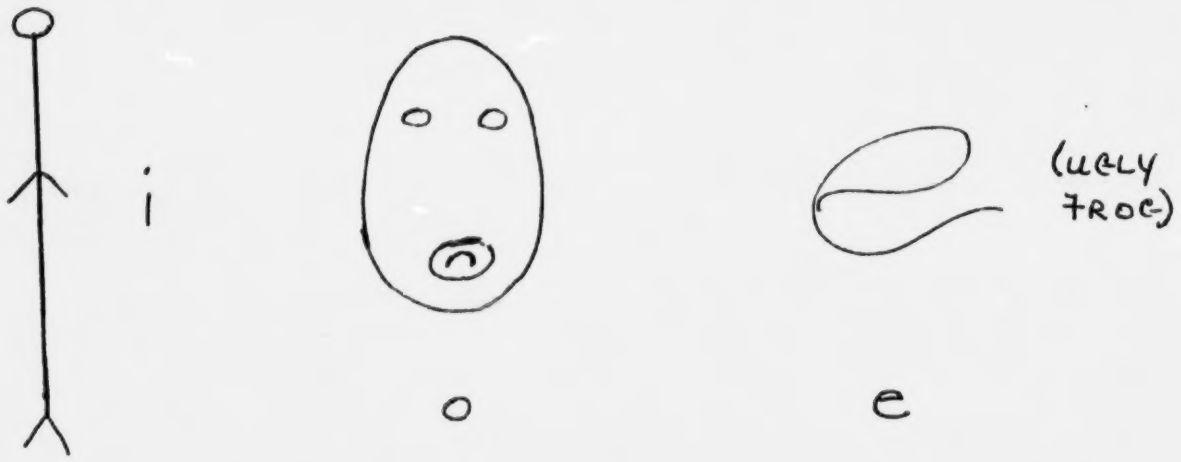
5) Navajo is the medium of instruction; English is taught as a subject.

He went on to pose the question of when children might best be taught to read. He said that the British start at five years of age (or when they enter first grade) and the Americans, at six (also first grade.) In theory, those Navajo children who must learn English first can not start to read in English until they are seven.

The evening session began with William Morgan, Sr. giving some background on the Navajo Community College and describing what is going on there now. He said that the Tribal Council had requested that some elements of traditional Navajo culture be taught; for in the past, grandfathers had told their grandchildren about Navajo culture and history. Now, however, with everyone going to school, these stories are not often heard. The College is trying to preserve knowledge of the language and culture, and, at the same time to give off-Reservation people some traditional values to fall back on. Mr. Morgan is principally involved with the teaching of the language, a part of the Navajo Studies Program offered at the College. He explained that many young people do not know their clan or much of their cultural heritage, but that some are more aware than others of these traditions. Last year, the language classes were required but it was apparent

that some students were not interested in learning Navajo. They asked, "Why learn to read and write Navajo when there are so few reading materials?" In fact, few materials are available and these are put out by various missionary groups. As part of the language class, consultants are brought in to retell stories and legends and also, on Mondays, there is an American Indian Seminar to which Indian leaders are invited to talk on current problems. Students are expected to participate in dances, ceremonies, and field trips. Right now the program is limited by the facilities but more will be possible when the college moves to its permanent campus.

Paul Platero then spoke about his involvement in the Navajo Studies Program. He is a language teacher who teaches Navajo both to Navajos who don't speak Navajo and to those who do. He also teaches creative writing in Navajo. He argued that Navajo books should be entirely in Navajo and showed us a Navajo-only version of Little Man's Family. He also suggested that audio-visual aids be used as much as possible in the language class. As an example, he drew some figures that he uses to elicit certain sounds that would name a sound. He gave the demonstration in Navajo.



He suggested strongly to the Navajo Reading Study staff that they try hard to find out what Navajo children really like to write and read about.

Paul, who also teaches adults who already read in English to read in Navajo, briefly described that program. First, he introduces the Navajo vowels, for they are always the same no matter where they occur. At first he uses words that have no diacritics. Next he presents those consonants which are similar to the English consonants and then, he introduces the ones which are not, e.g., tl. Next, he introduces the conventions signaling long vowels, high tone, glottal stops and nasals. He demonstrated an audio-visual aid, "syllable strips", which he used to give the students maximum practice. He also suggested two kinds of games for children; one is similar to the Playskool picture and work puzzles:

Another is like Battleship:

	1	2	3	
A			di	
B	be			
C				

In the latter, the child is given the key and then asked to figure out A3, B1. At home, he writes di be but to be correct he must put in all the diacritics: dibé.

Ken Begishe, who is presently doing research for Dr. Oswald Werner of Northwestern University at Tsegi (tséyi'), Arizona, told about his work on an anatomical atlas in Navajo. He explained that this involved a sentence dictionary, which includes simple to complex sentences, a list of terms (classification) and diagrams. He explained that he works directly from transcriptions and tapes and that he spends a great deal of time interviewing people. He provided an example of his work.

The Saturday meeting began with a description of what the Navajo Reading Study is all about. Penny Murphy gave everyone a copy of the Navajo Reading Study Progress Report No. 3 and explained that the bibliography was by no means complete. She went on to say that the Navajo Reading Study would appreciate any help, suggestions or corrections the group could make. It was suggested that the teachers might send

a copy of any materials which they use to the Study. Then, Paul Murphy reported on the first survey of the language competence exhibited by six-year-old Navajo children at the beginning of school. He outlined the process by which letters of explanation and questionnaires were sent to all BIA Agency Schools and to the Public School systems on or near the Reservation. He said that the tentative results show that 70% to 90% of all the children either do not speak enough English or do not speak enough English to do first grade work when they came to school in September. Bernard Spolsky commented that it would be interesting to see to what extent the picture is changing - something that only a census over a period of years would show.

Wayne Holm talked about another aspect of the Study, the sample of language of six-year-old Navajo children. He explained the rationale behind the sample and said that a Navajo Reading Study consultant, Dr. Richard Venezky, Associate Professor of the Computer Sciences Department of the University of Wisconsin, had maintained that this was an essential part in developing good reading materials. Wayne Holm went on to tell how the language sample would be collected and then be analyzed by computer.

Bernard Spolsky pointed out that one of the inevitable problems in developing reading materials is that of standardization. He asked the group for their opinions.

Ken Begishe said that he favors a great deal of standardization, both of written and spoken Navajo. He suggested that the Young and Morgan Dictionary could be a great help in the movement toward standardization. William Morgan also stressed the need for standardizing written Navajo. He gave examples of different pronunciations, and, in some cases, different words for the same Navajo word. Dr. Spolsky then asked if he were putting a book together, how he might know if he should write 'mósí' or 'másí' and which is "standard". Paul Platero suggested that a group of individuals, who are authorities on Navajo, is urgently needed to form an "academy" to set the standards. The Academy, which would have the whole Nation as consultants, would then be the central authority in questions of language. He went on to say that in some cases, the Academy would have to show how different regions use a certain word, e.g., 'x' is said in Canoncito and 'z' in such and such an Agency. He said that the older folk would necessarily have to be included and that it would be necessary to get the support of the Council. Platero also argued for basic literacy for all adults. He said it would be the job of the whole group to convince the people that bilingual education can be <u>good</u> education. Begishe brought out that the Navajo School Boards meet together periodically and that it might be a good idea to "indoctrinate" them at these meetings. He further suggested that the 'polite' 3a form be used in the classroom.

Spolsky asked the group to tell of their needs and their ideas for research, materials, and teacher training. Rebecca Dotson began the discussion by suggesting the need for materials which are sequenced from little or no vowel markings to the full use of diacritics. She said she liked Paul Platero's method of using simple words with no markings.

Ken Begishe gave his thoughts on teaching vowels. He said that it is very important that they be written the way they sound. As he put the following on the board, he explained that he uses glottal stops so that the child won't have trouble with them later.

a	e	i	o
ah	eh	ih	oh
'ah	'eh	'ih	'ch
ch'	k'	t'	ts'
ch'ah	k'ah	t'ah	ts'ah

He also uses pictures with key words. His order of presentation is the following:

1) all the a sounds: a - gad, ah - gah, aa - laa, aa - baa, aah - baah,
2) all the nasal a sounds,
3) all the a sounds with high tones,
4) all the a sounds with high tones and nasal sounds.

In questioning the need for teaching ah separately, Wayne Holm said that since no word actually ends in a vowel, a would be

understood as ah or a and that a native speaker would either know that or test for it. Begishe answered that he thought that it would be easier to cut out the 'h' when it is not needed.

Bernard Spolsky summed up the preceeding discussion by saying that many different approaches have been tried and now that it remains to be seen if they all work equally well or if one way works better.

Jane Hill asked about generalizing for rhyming purposes in Navajo. Bernard Spolsky suggested that it might be a good idea to do some experiments on vowel quality and find out what the implications are for teaching. Jane then requested that the computer make lists of words that fit a certain description; e.g., low aah words.

William Morgan talked about teaching adult literacy. He observed that it is harder to teach the Navajo vowels to those adults who already know how to read in English. He said that in his experiences of teaching both teenagers (in the 1950's) and adults, he found that they learn to read successfully by the whole word (look-say) method. He also found it easy to teach high tone using whole sentences.

Bob Norris talked about the importance of being aware of the general principles of learning. He talked about the following:

1) How to teach the alphabet.
2) What are the objectives in teaching in Navajo and what are the educational principles used in teaching?
3) What are the general concepts and generalizations concerning reading, writing, speaking and thinking in Navajo?
4) What is the real reason for teaching the language?
5) How much of what you teach in Navajo has to do with cultural aspects, interaction among people, conflicts between Anglo and Navajo behaviors, etc.?
6) What are the problems in the transfer of English? (Cultural aspects as well as pronunciation problems.)
7) What is the relationship between ESL and Navajo?
8) How can what we know about teaching in general be applied to the specific problems of teaching Navajo?
9) How can the various experimental approaches be brought together and how can the progress of children be noted?
10) How are the immediate needs for vocabulary terms for science and math being met?

Bernard Spolsky responded that the experimental situation is always vague and that each school will have to establish general principles, but that it is true that these things need to be done.

Rebecca Dotson expressed her need for sequenced learning materials, which go from reading readiness to a combination of

social studies and reading for the older grades. Ethelou Yazzie emphasized the need for all kinds of reading materials. She also suggested that all the Navajo teachers get together and prepare unified materials in both Navajo and English. Irene Silentman expressed the need for more training in writing Navajo. She said that she would like to try out some of the ideas expressed in the meeting on individual children. Ethelou Yazzie said that the teachers need some sort of evaluation process to find out if the children are learning and what they are learning. Norma Francisco felt the need for more teacher training. Ken Begishe suggested that teacher guides would be helpful in building up confidence in teaching.

Judy Harvey remarked that there is the mistaken notion that bilingual education is useful and needed only at the kindergarten and beginners levels. She also remarked that it would be a good idea to let others who are interested know what is happening in bilingual education at Rock Point. She thought that transcribing the children's own stories would be a good idea. Computer-assisted-instruction was suggested as one way to do this.

Jane Hill said that the Navajo children seem to have a high degree of visual perception but that they don't evidence good auditory perception. Therefore, they need more auditory perception materials. She suggested that teachers be trained

to the effective use of the 'dead pan', that is, not giving away the answers on their faces.

Anthony Harvey thought that those interested in initial reading in Navajo should get together more often to share their ideas. Marie Platero offered the opinion that both the teachers and the aides need more training in Navajo child behavior. She went on to explain some of her work. She teaches a group of beginners who have had bilingual kindergarten experience. In addition to other activities mentioned earlier, her groups draw pictures, label them and sound out syllables to make words and to write them.

In summarizing the conference, Bernard Spolsky listed some key concerns which had come to his attention during the meetings. Among these were: the assessment of community attitudes, the standardization of Navajo, and the necessity for sequenced materials. He ended the conference with an invitation to all to visit the Navajo Reading Study center when in Albuquerque.